

**“N8JOY”**  
**SURVIVING WITH PRIDE**  
**BY ALAN RUSKIN, LOS ANGELES**

From her decidedly regal bearing, one would hardly guess that as a child Linda Kaye was subjected to humiliating abuse on a regular basis. She lost her biological father through divorce when she was just a year old. Her mother remarried to a man whom Linda describes as a “monster.” Beginning at the age of four, she endured verbal, physical and sexual abuse, which continued through her early adolescence. Her stepfather also beat and demeaned her older brother, who eventually died at 40 of alcoholism and drug addiction, having chosen “to live and die without knowing his own happiness,” despite Linda’s attempts to introduce him to Buddhism. Her mother was no help. “To this day she claims we were a normal family. She’s in total denial of the reality of what happened, which is common for women who are victims of abusers.” In the meantime, her father remarried and had two more sons that Linda never knew growing up. As a teenager, Linda also got into drugs and skipped school for days at a time just to have her own space. Her desperate youth left her, by her own description, a “handicapped person.”

As might be expected, Linda does not relish the re-telling of her horrific experiences. She feels it’s necessary, however, to understand how she became programmed to be the person she grew up to be for much of her life, and the subsequent painful and heroic struggle she has waged based on her Buddhist practice to evolve into the person she is today.

Linda, who has been practicing Buddhism for twenty-six years and is a leader in the San Fernando Mid-Valley chapter of Los Angeles, says, “The last two-and-half years have been a great challenge personally. About a year and a half ago I went through intense therapy, trying to save my marriage as well as understand the root cause of my long-term suffering in relationships.” (Linda had two previous failed marriages). “This process was painful but very enlightening, as I was able to identify my suffering in a very acute manner. It became a question of taking full responsibility and realizing that I would be working to heal myself throughout my life.”

The core of what Linda learned is that as a result of never having a true, caring father, she tended to subconsciously seek relationships with men who were in some way unavailable. “I understood that how I acted was a direct result of the damage done in my childhood, that a child will create coping mechanisms to survive trauma and I was still doing these same behaviors as an adult.” Linda’s therapist, incidentally, is an SGI Buddhist, something for which she is very grateful. She had trouble finding people to confide in who had experienced traumas similar to her own. “I was able to trust my therapist on the deepest level.”

Seeing the flaws in her character, however, was something of a trauma in itself. “When it hit me as to how I was behaving, I could barely speak for two months. When I was going through therapy, much was being unearthed in my inner world. I had the hardest time finding a woman leader who could relate to the myriad of feelings I was having. Somehow I knew that I was that leader and that I had to have a successful experience because I needed to encourage others who had suffered from child abuse.”

In 1998, Linda met with Matilda Buck, currently SGI-USA women’s division leader and explained her dilemma of not being able to find someone who could understand what she was going through and “who didn’t look at me funny when I burst into tears. She talked to me for over an hour and encouraged me to continue therapy and do the work I needed to do. She told me, ‘you’re a quick study, you can get the point of all of this.’ She said I would need to know

what that work was about in order to help other women. I understood at that moment that I must undertake the task of healing my life. It was my mission to do so.”

Linda continued her therapy and made identifying the root cause of her suffering the focus of her prayers. The result was that her depression began to lift. “My therapist assured me that I didn’t have to own the shame I was feeling, and corrected my self-slander by having me repeat to myself, ‘I am excellent, I am excellent.’ I felt an empowerment I had never felt before, a taste of real freedom inside my life. And guess what? Within two weeks my boss (Linda works as an assistant to a top executive in the music information-technology field) was praising me to the sky! ‘You’re amazing,’ he said, ‘a star! Don’t ever think of leaving us!’ I never had an employer praise me like that.”

As for the effect on her troubled marriage of her gain in self-awareness, the result was perhaps not what she had originally sought. “As I grew, my husband became very insecure because he could no longer control me. Another relationship-nightmare ensued—he even tapped my phone and had me followed. Eventually he asked me to leave because he could no longer deal with what I had to go through to recover from the trauma of my childhood.” Linda stresses that a relationship with a victim of child abuse is no easy matter. “Partners of people who are survivors of child sexual abuse have a struggle. They are dealing with someone who is basically a handicapped person. I view myself this way because I have emotional challenges that I have to deal with all the time. It’s like I’m in the Special Olympics... breaking through my own limitations.”

Linda spent that Christmas alone, but realized that because of her Buddhist practice she was protected every step of the way. Clearly, the marriage she had been struggling to save was not the one that would truly make her happy, and in the process, “I fought very hard to become emotionally stable, and I did. It feels good to be me now.”

Her story would not be complete without relating an event that demonstrated to Linda the wondrous mystic power of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. She was meeting with a sales rep, Lisa Mancini, with whom she had spoken and met before. While supplying some personal information, Linda mentioned that she had just changed her maiden name and created her own last name. The reason, she told Lisa, was that she wasn’t thrilled with her maiden name. As Linda explains, “My maiden name is Kemmerer, but I didn’t disclose that information to Lisa at that moment.” The sales rep responded that her husband wanted to change his last name to her last name because he had a double “er” at the end of his name and he didn’t like it. “I stopped,” says Linda, “and asked her what the name was.”

She said, “Kemmerer, my husband’s name is Marcus Kemmerer.”

Linda’s eyes widened in amazement “He’s my brother!” she said.

“He is not!” Lisa exclaimed in disbelief.

“He’s an architect.”

“Did I tell you that?”

“No,” Linda replied, “and his father’s name is Russ.” (Linda’s biological father. Marcus is Linda’s half brother.)

By this time, as Linda relates the story, the sales rep was screaming and Linda was sitting at her desk in tears. “All of the family revolution I had done, especially in the past two years when I came to grips with the damage done to my life as a result of child abuse, seemed to arrive at a point of closure in this one incredible moment.” It wasn’t long before Linda met Marcus and his family, shared Easter and Thanksgiving with them, and learned that she and her brother shared many similar impressions of their father. “Marcus told me how our father was such a hands-off kind of guy and didn’t participate in his life very much. That made me feel much

better about myself because now I could let go of the feeling that my father didn't want me, since Marcus had experienced the same kind of distant relationship. I was finally purging the root of my repeated self-negating behaviors with men."

Going back to the beginnings of her Buddhist practice, Linda joined SGI when she was 19 and immediately immersed herself in young women's activities, finding the warm, supportive family she had never known. "Because I never had a real, loving father, I very quickly, once I came to understand what he was about, adopted President Ikeda as a father-figure." Her eyes grow misty and her voice cracks as she adds, "I just knew he would never, ever hurt me. I trusted him completely. Because of him I was able to grow up splendidly."

As a result of her painful childhood, Linda says becoming a completely happy person is a struggle, "but struggling has become an art, because now I'm really striving toward a lot of goals. It's almost like a willfully imposed struggle, one I can derive a lot of joy from." In addition to her high-powered job, Linda is going to school to complete her degree in business management and pursuing other interests that contribute to her growth. "I like to paint and I sing in our company's rock and roll band. I love to read and usually have three or four books going at a time." And on top of all that, she's writing a book on child abuse, as she feels that educating others about this is her special mission. "As a survivor, I want the whole world to know that child abuse is demonic, that it corrupts the world."

Echoing President Ikeda's words, "You must not for one instant give up your effort to build for yourselves new lives," Linda says that she's creating her own life now — it's not just happening to her. "Instead of blaming those who caused me pain, I'm recreating my inner landscape, the blueprint of my life. I call it my gardening project."

But Linda is quick to add, "It can't be just about myself. I have too many members in my chapter. I can't have the luxury of feeling sorry for myself. I have to fight very hard for the happiness of others. I want to encourage people through my experience, show through my victories that it's impossible to lose when you do this practice correctly."

Bottom line for Linda is that she can now see that "all my suffering has been for kosen-rufu, all my victories are to encourage others. As she concludes, "There is simply no gnarly, mutated karma that you can't change when you truly embrace this Buddhism."

There is a term in the English language called "synecdoche," (pronounced sin-EK-do-key), which means showing a part of something to represent the whole. For example, in a movie, a close-up shot of a hand making a particular motion or gesture might be used to indicate the emotional state of the whole person. In Linda Kaye's case, her e-mail address, n8joy@yahoo.com pretty much says it all.